

VZCZCXRO9860
OO RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH
DE RUEHGO #1417/01 2690033
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 260033Z SEP 06
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5180
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1136
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9903
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4335
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1798
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3531
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0505
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7002
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4621
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0908
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0912
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0635
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2861
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0513
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001417

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/24/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: NO MOVEMENT AT THE TOP IN BURMA

RANGOON 00001417 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: On September 22, Agence France-Press (AFP) wire service reported that the regime's top two generals planned to hand over their military roles to subordinates. The report has so far proved to be groundless. GOB controlled media continue to show both commanders in uniform performing their normal duties. Rumors continue to circulate that the regime may be about to transition its ruling military apparatus to a civilian administration by replacing local and district military SPDC chairmen with loyal, hand-picked civilians who will report to the Ministry of Home Affairs rather than to the Ministry of Defense. While AFP appears to have jumped the gun with its September 22 story, rumors of significant changes continue to surface despite the regime's efforts to keep a tight hold on information. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) On the evening of September 22 (local time), an AFP report circulated that at the SPDC's quarterly meeting in Nay Pyi Taw, Senior General Than Shwe had turned over his role as Commander-in-Chief of Burma's armed forces to his trusted subordinate and SPDC number three, General Thura Shwe Mann. Than Shwe reportedly retained his positions of Head of State and Chairman of the SPDC. The story reported that at the same meeting, Vice Senior General Maung Aye also handed over his positions as Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services to Southwest Regional Commander Major General Thura Myint Aung, while retaining his post of Vice-Chairman of the SPDC.

13. (C) AFP's Senior Rangoon Correspondent Khin Maung Thwin, apparently trusting his Nay Pyi Taw sources, decided to try to get a scoop and run the unverified story. The story spread through Rangoon like wildfire and Singapore's international television service Channel News Asia and Radio

Free Asia both picked up the AFP report. Other news correspondents in Rangoon counseled caution and Embassy sources in Nay Pyi Taw said they could not verify the report.

The regime's nightly news broadcast on September 22 contained no news about any changes in its military leadership, referred to Than Shwe by his military title, and showed him conducting his usual government meetings.

14. (C) Htay Aung, an exile analyst of the Burmese military, has predicted for more than a year that Thura Shwe Mann is destined for the commander-in-chief position, so perhaps a combination of wishful thinking and the regime's chokehold on information led to the premature report by AFP. Local AFP staff today insist that they are standing by their story. (AFP was also the first news agency to report Prime Minister Khin Nyunt's fall from power in 2004; that story was ultimately vindicated.)

15. (C) Additionally, there have been various reports in exile and official media that township and village level Peace and Development Council (PDC) chairpersons with military affiliations are about to be replaced with civilians equally loyal to the SPDC. A recent rumor has also surfaced that this change will also take place at the division level and that the division PDC chairpersons will now report to the Ministry of Home Affairs rather than to the Ministry of Defense. On the evening of September 24 our contacts reported that all division level PDCs had been called to Nay Pyi Taw for an urgent meeting.

16. (C) COMMENT: The regime held its quarterly military meeting on September 11 and rumors of military reshuffles usually spread wildly after these secret meetings. Thura Shwe Mann is a strong contender to eventually become Commander-in-Chief, but Than Shwe is unlikely to give up his

RANGOON 00001417 002.2 OF 002

military titles until he has a powerful civilian post to move into. Thura Myint Aung, now the Southwest Division Regional Commander (not Southeast, as some media reported) would be a surprise candidate for a top role. He has a reputation for being very corrupt and for using forced labor liberally when he was the Southeast Region Commander based in Mawlamyine (Moulmein), Mon State. Given the regime's penchant for secrecy, the AFP report may have been a red herring, but is also possible that it presages significant shuffles to come at the top ranks of Burma's ruling generals. END COMMENT.
STOLTZ